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REPRESENTATIVE WOMEN

General Editor : Francis Birrell

MRS MONTAGU

QUEEN OF THE BLUES

REPRESENTATIVE WOMEN

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DUCHESS OF KINGSTON
Beatrice Curtis Brown

LADY HESTER STANHOPE
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SARAH CHURCHILL,
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Mrs Elizabeth
Montagu

MRS MONTAGU
QUEEN OF THE BLUES

BY

JOHN BUSSE

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DEDICATED

MRS MONTAGU

(1720—1800)

I

REVALUATIONS PRODUCE curious results in every age that is rash enough to attempt them. A few more altars are set up, but the number of empty shrines gradually increases. The present generation is supposed to be rather exceptional in its critical ferocity. Yet in spite of this the legend of 'the famous Mrs Montagu' survives, and the 'Queen of the Blues' possesses an ever-widening circle of admirers. Her letters have been published in four fat volumes; her friends have suffered a similar fate. Year by year the output of Montagu literature is steadily augmented.

This might easily be explained if the eighteenth century had been lacking in great men and great material, and the historian had to people his wilderness with genius of secondary rank. But for an age that produced Johnson, Reynolds, Garrick, as well as a score of others who have made a deep impression on English art and literature, the vitality of the Montagu legend is all the more remarkable. For legendary it must now appear, since neither for the spoken nor for the written word did Elizabeth Montagu achieve fame in its larger sense.

Mrs Montagu has left us nothing of importance. She wrote the last three essays in Lyttelton's *Dialogues of the Dead* and—her more serious contribution to literature—an Essay on Shakespeare. Nobody ever reads the Dialogues ; and the Essay, if read at all, is read only by a few casual students of Shakespearian criticism. Then there are her letters. These, it would not be unfair to say, consist mainly of gossip, varied by some shrewd observations on men and matters. They cannot challenge comparison with the charm of Mme de Sévigné's, or with the brilliant eccentricity of the *Letters from Constantinople* of Elizabeth Montagu's namesake and cousin, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu.

Without abusing language we cannot call her notorious. Wilkes, with his scandalous *Essay on Woman*, and Elizabeth Chudleigh, easily eclipsed all their contemporaries in the lists of notoriety. The amazing adventures of the Duchess of Kingston fill many pages of Mrs Montagu's correspondence and meet with the censure which we might expect from such a domestic paragon. This was only typical. Of all extremes, whether in politics, or in love, or in philanthropy, she had a rooted distrust. In an age famous for its learning, its piety and its folly, Elizabeth Montagu pursued a comparatively uneventful way.

Contemporaries seem to have felt the same difficulty in justly appraising her worth ; her standard and degree of merit, as it were. Everywhere we find a conflict of opinion. Johnson, indeed, who loved but quarrelled with her, called her 'a very extraordinary woman,' and gave as a reason that she had a constant stream of conver-

sation. As the Doctor was well known for the somewhat rigid limits he placed upon the conversation of other people, particularly if he happened to be talking to them, the compliment ought to be regarded with a certain amount of suspicion.

Alexander Carlyle disliked her for her affectations, and Nathaniel Wraxall, something of a 'blue-stocking' himself and only acquainted with her when she was an old woman, grumbled that she was dictatorial and sententious, and lacking in good taste. Mrs Vesey he thought more select and delicate, while Mrs Thrale possessed at least as much information and even more brilliancy of intellect. Horace Walpole, who never loved her, alternatively sneered and praised. At one moment she was 'Mrs Montagu of Shakespearshire'; at another he is admiring her wit and her good taste in decoration.

With the women she fared worse. Fanny Burney found her 'a character rather to respect than to love, for she had not that "don d'aimer" by which alone love can be made fond or faithful.' Mrs Thrale was more outspoken. She was not merely Mrs Montagu's rival for 'colloquial eminence' but her rival for Dr Johnson's friendship. That was enough indeed to separate any women; so most of the harsh criticisms of the 'Queen of the Blues' came from Streatham, with occasional crumbs of malicious cynicism from Walpole at Strawberry Hill.

On the other side may be set the many men and women who sang her praises, sometimes to excess. A woman who ranked among her intimate friends Lord Bath, Lord Lyttelton and David Garrick, and claimed a considerable

acquaintance with Johnson, Edmund Burke and Reynolds, could not be altogether lacking in wit or in charm. Lord Bath, indeed, declared that he did not believe a more perfect human being existed, and Lyttelton and Burke agreed with him. Allowing for much that belongs essentially to the language and convention of the day, their letters to her display an affection and an admiration which can only have been created by some solid attributes.

For a matter-of-fact age the century was surprisingly prolific in compliment and adulation ; and Mrs Montagu was a very rich woman, possessed of great influence and very desirable friends. But even so, it is clear that we have found in her a person of no common calibre, a character of no ordinary worth. She was, if not famous, distinguished. In her salon, in Hill Street and later in Portman Square, she entertained all the leaders of thought and fashion in the London of the day. Wraxall called her in a moment of inspiration ' the Madame du Deffand of the English Capital '—distinguished for her friends and for the record her letters keep of the lives and friendships of the leaders of her times.

2

THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY began and ended with religious wars. There were plots and conspiracies, Guy Fawkes and Titus Oates, and within fifty years Cromwell, Dutch William, and the Hanoverians. In such turbulent days the castle keep was more important than the *salon*.

After the Restoration there was a gradual softening of manners and of the tone of society. Charles II was the patron of these feministic influences. He always liked women, and during his exile had developed a remarkable taste for them. Later on, when the House of Hanover came to the Throne, they encouraged this tendency, but for a different reason. They wanted the country gentlemen round them in London, and not on their estates, where they might be plotting with the Jacobites. Castles gave way to town houses. The royal drawing-room became more important than the *levée*.

As the eighteenth century progressed so the studiously cultivated illiteracy of women began to disappear. Towards this goal, life in London had quietly followed the lead of Paris, and had adopted the manners of the *siècle de Louis quatorze* without falling into the excesses which disgraced the Regency. If not so brilliant in wit

or in achievement as the Couvent St Joseph, or the Rue St Honoré, eighteenth-century London society was at least of quite respectable talent.

Flourishing at about its zenith, Mrs Montagu was still something of a prodigy to her women friends, who found the writing of a common letter a hard enough task for their slender wits. But an example once set was soon followed. At the end of the century women shared an equality with men as dramatists, historians or memoir-writers, and as novelists they definitely eclipsed them. Fanny Burney wrote *Evelina* before Mrs Montagu had moved to Portman Square ; and with Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen women established an undisputed sway in this particular field which they held until the publication of *Waverley* thirty-five years later.

This 'humanizing' influence had not proceeded very far by the time Mrs Montagu first began to hold her assemblies. Society was still vulgar and coarse, and her own letters and those of her friends provide ample evidence of it. But the germs of our own standards began to emerge, and those who broke them were now ridiculed and rebuked.

When Doctor Monsey, an old friend of Mrs Montagu's, entertained the King of Denmark on a visit to England, he washed his face and hands for the occasion ; since 'that fatal day when he received infant baptism never had his face known the touch of water.' Dr Monsey was then fifty-nine. But fifty years before this the man who had lived otherwise would have been considered a crank. The same might be said of table manners. Dr Johnson was an habitual visitor at Hill

Street, and fashionable ladies were at pains to cultivate him. Yet he delighted in eating lobster sauce with plum pudding, and devoured a plateful of stewed carp with the assistance of his fingers only. Even Boswell admits that 'his appetite was so fierce, and indulged in with such intenseness that while in the act of eating, the veins of his forehead swelled, and generally a strong perspiration was visible.'

If life was rough indoors it was worse still in the streets and places of public resort. When Elizabeth Robinson was a girl and lived with her parents at Cambridge or at Hythe, her letters are full of accounts of storms making the country roads impassable, of coaches sticking fast in the mud, and of driving home from dances late at night with the aid of the indispensable full moon, and being upset in the mud on the way.

Life in town was very little better. Gay's *Trivia* is a sort of countryman's guide to London, a breviary of the dangers that he would meet. The streets were long and narrow, and the carriage-way a mere track running through them. On a rainy day carriages and drays stuck fast in the ruts, wheel locked with wheel, horses stamped, coachmen swore ; suddenly the chairmen of some beauty or nobleman would force their way through, cursing and dealing out blows to right and to left. Jets of water falling from the roofs, garbage thrown from the windows of the overhanging houses, open drains, foul sewers—such was Elizabeth's London.

At night the dangers were greater. Lincoln's Inn Fields, and Shepherd's Market in the fields of Mayfair, were the favourite resorts of thieves and robbers, and

even the Linkmen would ' dowse the glim ' in some dark alley-way, and then share the spoils of the traveller with the gang as their reward for acting as decoy.

Most of Elizabeth Robinson's girlhood was spent in the country, and she only came to live in London on her marriage to Edward Montagu, the quiet bespectacled mathematician and Member of Parliament for Huntingdon. Of this marriage much has been written, but it still remains an enigma. The young and pretty Miss Robinson was the spoilt child of her parents and was idolized by her friends. As a girl she had spent some years at Cambridge living with the University Librarian, the famous Dr Conyers Middleton, her grandmother's second husband. Much learned and donnish talk went on around her, and old Dr Middleton would insist on her giving him, after the guests had gone, an account of their conversation. Elizabeth used her eyes and ears, and picked up a lot of scattered learning. When she returned home she had already learned the art of carrying on a conversation ; she had already acquired what she retained throughout her life, ' the sprightly vivacity of fifteen with the judgment and experience of a Nestor.' Good looking, accomplished, with amazing vitality and a keen sense of fun, she was soon ardently pursued by every squire's son in the county. She won't be content with anybody, not she ! No one is safe from her irony and sportive wit, no matter how heartbroken he may be. ' I dwelt,' so she wrote, ' in the medium between judgment and fancy, and it was from this picture-drawing faculty that I always used to be amused and gay.' Her brain teems with gay images, her letters give them life.

TO LADY MARGARET HARLEY

Horton, May 22 1734

MADAM :

I suppose by this time the town is empty enough to give you leisure to read a tedious letter from a country correspondent. I have forborne writing in compassion to your Grace but now I may be allowed to have some upon myself ; but such is my misfortune I have nothing to entertain you with. If I should preach a sermon upon an old woman who died yesterday, you would think it a dry subject : or if I tell you my papa's dogs have devoured my young turkies, you will rather laugh at me than pity me ; or should I give you an account of our bustle about the election, it would not entertain you extremely. I think I may tell you, our new members have given a ball, and I am very glad they met with success, since they have made so good an use of it. I was too far distant from the ball to go to it, which afflicted me more than the loss of the old woman or the turkies.

I am surprised that my answer to your Grace's letter has never reached your hands. I sent it immediately to Canterbury by the servant of a gentleman who dined here, and I suppose he forgot to put it in the post. I am reconciled to the carelessness of the fellow, since it has procured to me so particular a mark of your concern. If my letter were sensible, what would be its mortification, that, instead of having the honour to kiss your Grace's hands it must lie confined in the footman's pocket, with greasy gloves, rotten apples, mouldy nuts, a pack of dirty cards, and the only companion of its sort, a tender epistle from his sweetheart, 'tru tell Deth.' Perhaps by its situation subject to be kicked by his master every morning, till at last, by ill usage and rude company, worn too thin for any other use, it may make its exit in lighting a tobacco pipe. I believe the fellow who lost my letter

knew very well how ready I should be to supply it with another.

Elizabeth was fourteen when she wrote this. Margaret Harley, grand-daughter of the great Lord Treasurer Oxford, had met her at Wimpole in Cambridgeshire. Although she was six years older than Elizabeth the two girls became the closest friends and remained so throughout their lives. When Margaret married the Duke of Portland, Elizabeth was a frequent visitor at Bulstrode. The Duke joined the ranks of Elizabeth's admirers and gave her the nickname of 'Fidget.' When she was ill he wrote: 'You being got rid of your feaver gave us great joy, for we began to be uneasy about Fidgett; nobody can see her without admiration, and when one hears her open her lips, one is struck dumb.' Her high spirits were infectious. Contemplation, she thought, was not made for any woman on the right side of thirty, so no matter what mischief her friends were up to Elizabeth Robinson was always first and foremost in the fun.

The heavy-footed squire or squire's son always provoked her satire. If they made love to her she was quite ruthless. If they tried to dance with her she took her revenge.

TO J. B. ESQ

Kent

Whereas complaint has been made to us Commissioners of her Majesty's Balls, Hops, Assemblies etc for the county aforesaid, that several able and expert men, brought up and instructed in the art or mystery of dancing, have and daily do refuse, though often thereunto requested, to be retained and exercised in the aforesaid art or mystery,

to the occasion of great scarcity of good dancers in these parts, and contrary to the Laws of gallantry and good manners, in that case made and provided ; and whereas, we are likewise credibly informed that you J. B. Esq though educated in the said art, by that celebrated master Lally, senior, are one of the most notorious offenders on this point. These are therefore in the name of the Fair Sex, to require you, the said J. B. Esq personally to be and to appear before us at our meeting holden this day at the sign of the Golden Ball, in the parish of Horton, in the County aforesaid, between the hours of twelve and one in the forenoon, to answer to such matters as shall be objected against you, concerning the aforesaid refusal, and contempt of our jurisdiction and authority ; and to bring with you your dancing shoes, laced waistcoat, and white gloves. And hereof fail not, under peril of our frown and of being henceforth deemed and accounted an old batchelor. Given under our hands and seals this eighth day of October 1734 to which we all set our hands.

She found life in the country insupportably dull, and was always ready to jaunt off to London for a ball, or to stay at Bulstrode with the brilliant circle that surrounded her friend.

TO LADY MARGARET HARLEY

Horton, January 27th 1734

I hope I shall have the pleasure of paying my respects to your Ladyship soon, for though I am tired of the country, to my great satisfaction, I am not so much so as my papa ; he is a little vapoured and last night after two hours silence he broke out into a great exclamation against the country, and concluded in saying, living in the country was sleeping with ones eyes open ; if he sleeps all day I am sure he dreams very much of London.

What makes this place more dull is, my brothers are none of them here ; two of them went away about a fortnight ago, and ever since my papa has ordered me to put a double quantity of saffron in his tea. I beg you would not mention a word of this to my papa, when he has the honour of seeing you, for fear he should think I make too free with him.

With such a disposition 'Fidget' was always the centre of a circle of admirers. Yet suddenly she dismissed all her ardent and youthful suitors and married a man thirty years older than herself, and of no very great personal charm. We remain as mystified as her friends.

Marriage, however, was to play little or no part in Elizabeth Montagu's life. It gave her a town house, an assured position in society, and an income which was considerable enough. Of its other responsibilities she knew very little. Her only child died when he was fifteen months old, and this domestic tragedy seems to have turned her thoughts towards the creation of a circle of friends as a distraction. When her husband died at the age of eighty, she wrote to her sister that 'she had suffered the loss of a very affectionate and generous friend.' More than this he had never been to her.

Their marriage was one of perfect harmony and contentment until at any rate the later years of his life, when the peevishness of an invalid tried Mrs Montagu's patience somewhat severely.

On the whole he went his own way, dabbling in astrology and mathematics, with a little careful attention at times to his colliery interests in Durham and his farms at Newbury, and he allowed his wife to go hers. The arrangement suited her perfectly ; she had always had

her own way since she had been a child. One day Elizabeth Montagu had to manage these estates herself, and then she showed her practical side by looking after collieries, farms and fashionable assemblies well on into the sixties and seventies of her life. But to love, with its surrenders and renunciations, Elizabeth remained a stranger. Quite early in life she discovered that 'gold is the chief ingredient in the composition of earthly happiness—living in a cottage on love is certainly the worst diet and the worst habitation one can find out.' Edward Montagu had a fine house in Dover Street and bought Sandleford Priory and Denton Hall soon after his marriage. Elizabeth had certainly not made a mistake when she married him. She liked opulence, and as one of the twelve children of a small country squire she had led a rather restricted existence. She gave her hand to the one man who could keep her as she desired to be kept, and she never regretted it. If she had any emotions at all she kept a tight rein upon them, for late in life she was able to write quite seriously to her old friend Mrs Carter : 'You and I who have never been in love.'

It was a curious gap in her character, and accounted for much hostile criticism. She could not love ; could not give herself up to another. And worse still, she could not sympathise with the *affaires* of her friends. If they are distant friends she records their desertion with a smile ; but if they are near ones she roundly charges them with disloyalty to herself. Such an unfortunate prejudice deprived her character of much of its charm. It supported some of her critics who said that there was nothing feminine about her ; that she was satirical and

severe rather than amiable or inviting. It brought unhappiness to her friends, and nearly wrecked the life of one of her particular *protégées*—Dorothea Gregory.

The incident is painful but revealing. For some years Dr Gregory's rather attractive girl had lived with her as a companion, and eventually Elizabeth came to regard her as a daughter. Whether or not she had secret hopes that Dorothea would marry her nephew and heir Matthew Montagu, she certainly spared no pains to throw them in each other's way. Mrs Montagu fared no better than most match-makers. The two young people were completely indifferent to each other, and early in 1783 Miss Gregory wrote from Edinburgh seven well-filled pages describing the charms of the Reverend Archibald Alison, and her determination to have him for better or for worse.

Mrs Montagu's anger knew no bounds ; a flash of inspired unreason in one as a rule severely reasonable. Alison was quite a nice young man, and ' was well spoken of ' ; but he had no living and no fortune—fatal objections in Elizabeth Montagu's eyes.

Dorothea had fondly hoped that her friend and patroness would procure one and supply the other. She was sadly mistaken. Mrs Montagu, in command of the purse-strings, refused to hear of the match ; that is to say she told the heartbroken Dorothea that she could marry if she liked, but she could expect no help from her. Miss Gregory courageously determined to have Alison, and in spite of his £150 a year she married him. It made Mrs Montagu quite ill. ' To see her sacrifice all prudent considerations of every kind and all friendly

connection with me to a man she had not known ten weeks has been a great affliction.' To her cold reason Dorothea's conduct was inexplicable, and they were not reconciled until Matthew's marriage two years later to a girl of whom Mrs Montagu entirely approved. Then indeed she wrote a conciliatory letter, and removed the one obstacle to the match.

The marriage of Miss Gregory seemed an imprudence in her eyes ; she had never done anything so rash in her life. To marry for substantial reasons, was to marry respect and admiration. To marry for love ! 'I think the women and girls are run mad. Heaven be praised I have no daughters.' This was how she reflected on the incident to her friends.

Her prudence was many-sided. Late in life she developed quite a passion for building, and Wyatt was commissioned to add a new wing to the Old Priory at Sandleford. Elizabeth Montagu had always loved the Priory better than her other houses. Her husband had leased it from the Chapter at Windsor soon after their marriage, and on a hot summer's morning Elizabeth could leave Hill Street and reach Sandleford along the old coach road through Reading and Maidenhead just as the sun was setting. Some yards away from the house stood the Chapel, used as a lumber room by previous tenants. With this Wyatt did wonders. He transformed it into an Octagonal Room, and joined it to the house by a colonnade which formed a drawing-room. From the windows there was a beautiful view, over the terraced gardens of Capability Brown, to the Hampshire Hills in the far distance. Elizabeth was never happier than when

sitting in the shade of some tall elm on the terraces, and her writing table was always placed there in fine weather.

When her social position became more established she found Hill Street 'barbarously small'. A more ambitious project was undertaken. In 1777 she bought the lease of a site in Portman Square, and here early in 1779 the famous Palais Portman was built. The designs were originally drawn by Robert Adam, but for some reason or other the work was actually carried out by James Stuart, the painter and architect, whose work on the antiquities of Athens had earned him the name of 'Athenian Stuart'.

Mrs Montagu watched the completion of her great house with excitement. It was designed on a grand scale; all her life she had hated stuffy rooms. There were many delays. Mr Stuart was a great liar and Mrs Montagu often found him out. Charitably she thought that constant drunkenness must have affected his memory. At last, in the early months of 1782, her friends could be invited to see it. The cost was considerable, but she kept a close watch upon her workmen, and was able to write with satisfaction to Mrs Carter:

'Such are the resources of economy that from 1st Jan. 1775 to the 1st Jan. 1780 I had only exceeded my income taking the five years together only a total of £800 1. 2. and my house was then paid for as far as advanced.'

A strange but by no means uncharacteristic occupation for 'Minerva'.

No expense was spared in decoration and in making the place magnificent. The fine scagliola pillars and some of the carved ceilings and mantels still survive at what is now No. 22, Portman Square. The original

painting has almost entirely perished. Angelica Kauffman painted the ceilings, Bonomi decorated the hall and passages with sculpture, and Biagio Rebecca panelled the doorway of the celebrated 'Feather Room.' The price he asked was a high one. Rebecca wanted as much as eighty guineas for four pictures over the door. After some reflection Elizabeth paid. 'It was a larger price in proportion than the others, but as they approach nearer the eye they must be finished in a different manner.'

The Feather Room was an idea which seems to have sprung from her own fertile brain. Mrs Vesey's blue room in Bolton Row was to have its counterpart in Portman Square. Large canvas-mounted frames were hung round the room, and upon them were set feathers collected from all her friends, no matter whether peacock plumes, pheasant tails or even cock's feathers.

William Cowper thought it admirable :

> 'The birds put off their ev'ry hue
> To dress a room for Montague.'

Even Horace Walpole, who went to sneer, was surprised into praise. 'Instead of vagaries it is a noble edifice. When I came home I recollected that tho' I had thought it so magnificent a house there was not a morsel of gilding. It is grand, not tawdry, nor larded and embroidered and pomponned with shreds and remnants.'

The great house was what she wanted. In its vast and lofty rooms the 'Queen of the Blues' could suitably entertain her subjects. Her reign began with an inaugural breakfast to seven hundred people. She had some interesting friends, as we shall see.

3

THE TREMENDOUS CENTURY in which Elizabeth Montagu was born began with Marlborough and Blenheim and ended with Napoleon and Waterloo.

In its first years Sir Robert Walpole governed England in bad Latin for a King who could only speak low German. The next George in the year of Elizabeth's marriage led his guards in person at the battle of Dettingen, and people began to think a little better of the Hanoverians. Then Pitt conquered America in Germany ; but George III lost it again when Cornwallis surrendered, and the Stars and Stripes flew over York Town.

In England things were quite as eventful. Once indeed it looked as if the Hanoverians might be sent back again to Herrenhausen. The sound of the pipes was heard at Derby in '45, and the royal yacht was brought round to Vauxhall stairs in case of emergency. London throughout was the decisive factor ; with its money invested securely in the funds it frowned at ' Charlie', and the cause of the White Rose was lost for ever on the field of Culloden. Wilkes called George III a liar, and received £100,000 damages for doing it ; but not before his friends had broken many windows in Mayfair, Mrs Montagu's among them. Warren Hastings and Elizabeth

Chudleigh were tried fashionably in Westminster Hall, 'Junius' wrote some sensational letters, and just when the century was nodding with decrepitude Robespierre inaugurated a Reign of Reason with a Reign of Terror, while Watt was inventing the 'separate condenser' on Glasgow Green.

From the age of twenty-two Elizabeth Montagu lived in the heart of London Society, and in close touch with its leaders. We might expect her letters to be a mine of information and comment on all these things, and scattered here and there on the doubled quarto paper on which she wrote there are indeed casual references. But of politics, of the outer world, there is only a faint echo. Many of her friends were prominent on one side of the House or the other, but even ardent politicians like Lord Bath or Edmund Burke shook the political dust from their feet when they came to Hill Street or visited Mrs Vesey in Bolton Row. Only in this manner were the Olympians allowed to approach Parnassus.

Lord Bath was hardly an active politician. At eighty years of age he was not the same man whose future had seemed so brilliant to Walpole. Sir Robert was said to have feared his tongue, whether as 'Craftsman' or 'Patriot', more than another man's sword. But he made a fatal mistake by turning Walpole out in 1742 and preferring a peerage to office. His main occupation now was to carry on a mild flirtation with Mrs Montagu and enjoy his enormous wealth. They only knew each other for four years, yet during that time the friendship on her side developed into the one lasting attachment of her life.

She could never love anybody in the manner which is only possible to rarer natures ; but as far as she could love she gave her heart to Lord Bath.

On his side, Bath was a chivalrous and charming man. He was something of a connoisseur in pretty women ; he took an intellectual interest in them. It was he who discovered Elizabeth Chudleigh rusticating in a Devonshire village and brought her out in London. His attachment for her did not last long because she remained stupid and unlettered in spite of all his endeavours. Elizabeth Montagu at forty-four still possessed some of her store of youthful beauty and wild-fire, and with this, wit and learning enough to gladden the heart of a really great intelligence. Now, in his old age, Bath became deeply attached to her. The tongues wagged busily in Mayfair, and many a story was told about them in the flickering candle-light over the port. When they were not together these two lovers seem to have written to each other by every post.

Even the most malicious gossip was rather embarrassed by the respective ages of Minerva and her swain, but the stories were quite devoid of truth. Both of them found in their friendship the satisfaction of a desire for mutual companionship without the obligation of a liaison.

Some hint of scandal seems to have reached Elizabeth's ears and drew from her the following declaration :

' I should pity and despise the wretches if such there could be who could slander the friendship which it is the greatest honour of my life to receive and to give. I am ready to declare to the whole world I never saw anything

in it, that I could love, esteem and honour even to veneration as I do my Lord Bath ; if they can prove it to be sin or shame, to love the most amiable and admire the most noble virtues and talents let them put as much of sin and shame to my account as they please.'

Certainly Mr Montagu saw nothing to complain of in this friendship. He was proud, so he said, of Bath's admiration for his wife ; it raised her in his own estimation ; and whatever else he was, he was not of the stuff of which obliging husbands are made. Bath's wife, who was a great vixen and miser, had already been dead some years, so Mrs Montagu assumed the rôle of domestic mentor.

His friends said that Bath was the only man who could keep his head in the Wilkes affair. Grenville had already lost his, and George III merely hounded him on to harsher measures. At the moment the only result they had to show for their activities was the amazing popularity of Wilkes with the London mob, who prevented the burning of No. 45 of the *North Briton* and burnt an old boot and a petticoat in effigy of Lord Bute and Princess Augusta. If Wilkes had been carefully neglected he would have sunk back into the obscurity from which the folly of the King and Grenville had dragged him. Bath might have saved the situation before it was too late, and Mrs Montagu undertook to persuade him. But he was not to be drawn :

' I own it is shameful to appear in such times as these an inglorious Neuter, but at my time of life and where there is little probability of doing any good one may be excused for not meddling. . . . Nothing can save this

nation from sinking but schemes of economy and finding out some method of putting our enormous debt into a way of being gradually reduced.'

People always said this throughout the century, and the debt steadily went on piling up. It certainly never worried Lord Bath. He still dined at Hill Street with Elizabeth Montagu's *beaux esprits*, danced attendance on Mrs Vesey, and elaborated execrable puns for the amusement of the learned Mrs Carter at Deal.

In Elizabeth's company he felt himself growing young again. She seems to have had this effect on people. Bath talked of lasting ten years longer, and in this mood dined with Lord Bessborough one night at Roehampton. The evening was fine and the two peers took their port in the gardens by the riverside. The next day Bath had a chill. In the manner of the time he was blooded, blistered and purged, but even his fine constitution could not survive eighteenth-century medicine. Within a week he was dead. His death ended the greatest attachment of Elizabeth Montagu's life. For some time she was stunned by the blow ; death played such havoc with the few attachments of her life. Her son, Punch, and the young James MacDonald, a favourite *protégé* of hers who died at Rome a few years later, both died suddenly and tragically when her affection for them had begun to strike a deeper note. Lord Bath's death left her ' forlorn and annihilated '. So keen, so severe was her loss that for some time she could not write about it, and it is only in a very few of her letters, sent to her closest friends, that mention of it is made. When she died an envelope was found at the bottom of a pile of correspondence

endorsed in her hand : ' This note written by the great and good Earl Bath when delirious in his last illness is kept sacred to sorrow, and eternal regret of the best and sincerest and most amiable of friends.' Inside an almost illegible note testified to Lord Bath's affection for her, true until the last moment of his life.

Lord Bath was no sooner dead than an outcry was raised about his will. Even in his lifetime he was accused of being mean with his money, and once he even wrote to Elizabeth to ask her whether the charge was true. Tactfully she replied that perhaps he was somewhat over-prudent. Now a perfect flood of abuse was let forth. He had left no legacy to Mrs Carter ; his faithful valet was unprovided for ; there were no personal gifts to friends or old retainers. Bath left everything to old General Pulteney, his brother, who from all accounts shared in no small degree some of his own peculiarities. He left the stupendous sum of £2,000,000.

Even Elizabeth Montagu admitted that ' his last and most solemn act was unworthy of him ' ; and, most of all, she was hurt by his neglect of her friend Mrs Carter. Mrs (by courtesy) Carter had been one of his most constant companions. Mrs Montagu had met her some years previously and has described her as a ' prodigy of learning '. Prodigy of learning she undoubtedly was. She translated Epictetus ; contributed some rather involved articles to the *Rambler* and the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and was a minor poetess. Altogether a very excellent, a very learned, and probably a very tiresome person, but one of Elizabeth's most intimate friends.

Mrs Carter had been summoned to Sandleford on the

first news of Lord Bath's death. In her quiet virginal way the good Lady of Deal had admired him ; and her admiration survived even his neglect of her in his will. 'None of his friends will remember him longer and very few with equal affection.'

To the grief of these two ladies was added that of a third friend, Lord Lyttelton. George, 1st Lord Lyttelton and the friend of Pope, was a friend of Mrs Montagu's youth. When he was only Mr Lyttelton, the son of a wealthy Worcestershire Baronet and owner some day of Hagley, Elizabeth Robinson had rather set her cap at him.

Bath and Lyttelton, with Mrs Carter, Mrs Vesey and Mrs Montagu, were the first members of the 'blue-stocking' coterie. In London they met in Hill Street or Bolton Row. In the country they spent long week-ends at Lyttelton's fine place at Hagley or at Bulstrode, or with the Temples at Stowe.

One summer a notable party collected at Hagley. Garrick and his wife, Edmund Burke, the Temples, and Paoli, the Corsican patriot whom Johnson so admired, were already gathered there. Mrs Vesey was to arrive in a day or two. The party would be 'incomplete without Minerva'! Elizabeth Montagu readily accepted such a flattering invitation.

The weather was bad, but Garrick was in great form, and as they breakfasted in the library it was the easiest thing in the world to put some book into his hand and then persuade him to read a passage from it. Johnson's 'little rascal' had been a friend of hers for some time, and in the second year of her marriage she had seen him at

Goodman's Fields as Richard III. Their friendship remained unbroken till his death.

FROM DAVID GARRICK

Adelphi, Friday

MY BEST AND MOST AMIABLE FRIEND,

When you called last night my foot was flanell'd up wth ye gout, and a sight of you and ten words from You would have been a charm for ye foul Fiend—but I was order'd to see Nobody and did not know it was my cure till it was gone : I am much better, and so well I shall be able to appear in Old Lusignan to-night, and in a better Character to-morrow in Hill Street—in that of the faithful Friend and admirer of Mrs Montagu—I was reading or rather dozing over the cold, Northern Critick when you were at the door—notwithstanding his flattery to me, I can't bear the unfeelingness of his Soul. Shakespear no Tragick Poet ! Shakespear not the first Tragick Poet ! What insensibility—but more of this when I have ye honour of seeing you to-morrow, which I most certainly will do, tho' I am carried in a Litter and so lay'd at yr feet. Dear Madam, most unalterably and faithfully yrs.

DAVID GARRICK

Her own great interest in the drama was rather handicapped by delicate health. The atmosphere of Drury Lane made a visit there an ordeal for her, but she endured it cheerfully if Garrick was acting.

Lyttelton became jealous of Garrick's affection for her. ' Mrs Vesey,' so Garrick wrote to him, ' is a most agreeable woman. Mrs Montagu is herself alone. Were they 18 and I an Adonis of twenty-one I should love

one and adore the other. I would kiss the hands of the Sylph, but fall at the feet of Minerva '.

The Hagley party was followed by others. At their charming villa on the Thames at Hampton, the Garricks entertained Elizabeth Montagu, and five years later she was present at Drury Lane with that vast crowd which assembled to bid him farewell.

At Lyttelton's parties at Hagley we may be quite sure the *Dialogues of the Dead* were discussed. When Lyttelton published them in 1760 it was found that the last three were by a different hand. It soon began to be whispered that the hand was Elizabeth Montagu's.

Nothing cements a friendship so much as joint authorship—unless it breaks it altogether. Elizabeth's friendship with Lyttelton survived even this hard test. Something must be said of the *Dialogues* later : how they aroused the sneers of Horace Walpole, and how Johnson in a rash moment ventured on a criticism of them which barred him for many years from Hill Street and its mistress.

Lyttelton was a curious person. He seems to have been amiable and clever but completely lacking in worldly qualities. He must have been rather out of place in Elizabeth Montagu's drawing-room. 'He leaves his hat in one room, his sword in another and would leave his shoes in a third if his buckles though awry, did not save them ; his legs and arms by his awkward management of them seem to have undergone the " question extraordinaire " : and his head always hanging upon one or other of his shoulders seems to have received the first stroke upon the block.' Yet this was the man who wrote

Apollo disappointed and sent it to his 'Madonna'. Horace Walpole, who disliked him, said that 'he had the figure of a spectre and the gesticulations of a puppet'; and reported (or invented) the story of Mrs Montagu's postillion, who declared: 'I am not such a child but I can guess something; whenever my Lord Lyttelton comes to my Lady, she orders her porter to let in nobody else and then they call for a pen and ink and say they are going to write history.'

From what we know of both of them, this can only have been a rather amusing but not very credible libel. Lyttelton was a model of domestic virtue, and seems to have limited his indiscretions to perpetrating a little execrable poetry for Elizabeth's greater glory, and to writing many letters, pouring into her sympathetic ears his troubles with his son 'Naughty Tom'. The second Lord Lyttelton was exactly the son we should expect from such a father—a talented but completely dissipated young man. Mrs Montagu was always ready with her sympathy for her friends when they were in distress, but like most women did not find it very easy to condemn a handsome reprobate. Tom listened neither to his father's lectures nor to Elizabeth's sermons. When he was short of money he sold his reversions to the family estates; even Hagley was mortgaged. Elizabeth shed many tears at the fate in store for the 'Hagley Oaks'—and in fact they figure rather too frequently in her correspondence.

The story of Tom's end is well known. Bored to death with that apple of his father's eye, Hagley, where (he said) 'I might die of ennui before anything like the necessary remedy could be found,' he returned to Pitt

Place, Epsom, one week-end. With him went some of his boon companions and four young ladies whom Walpole maliciously described as 'four girls picked up in the Strand.' On the Saturday evening after a heavy dinner he fell back dead. The superstitious saw in this the hand of God: the practical were satisfied, however, that apoplexy was a more reasonable explanation.

4

ANOTHER RAKE for whom Elizabeth had a sentimental weakness was Edward Wortley Montagu, son of the famous Lady Mary. Edward Montagu's first cousin had married Lady Mary Pierrepont, as she then was, and so the two women were at least connected by marriage. Unfortunately, they never exchanged a letter, but there are several casual references in Elizabeth's letters to her family. In a letter to her sister Mrs Scott, Elizabeth Montagu set down her opinion of her cousin when the news came that she was dying of cancer. 'One use the world may make of her life, it fully exhibits that parts, riches, birth, and beauty all combined cannot rescue a character from contempt unless virtue and reason direct the use of them.'

Elizabeth never had any illusions about the worth of shallow brilliance. She denounced it repeatedly. The Sandleford goose-quill could never have written the *Letters during the Embassy to Constantinople.* The two women were poles apart. A toast of the Kit Cat Club at eight years of age, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu had all through her life demanded admiration. Elizabeth as a young woman had received it, and had been doubtless much gratified thereby, but she never allowed herself to become ridiculous. Lady Mary had no such scruples.

She eloped with Edward Wortley Montagu, because her father, the Duke of Kingston, rather wisely wanted to prevent her marrying him. Having married him against the wishes of her parents, she deserted him, and left her son to grow up into the 'ungovernable little rake' that he became.

There were scandals abroad and at home. Elizabeth Montagu shook her head at these indiscretions. The remarkable thing about Lady Mary was that she never kept her friends for long. Pope addressed extravagant love letters to her, which she seems to have answered coldly enough. But when he made love to her in earnest she made fun of him, with the result that Pope from being her most ardent admirer became her most passionate enemy. With Pope of all people the transition from love to libel was swift and easy. He lampooned her shamefully in the *Dunciad*. He reserved some of his grossest abuse for 'Sapho' in the *Imitations of the Satires of Horace*. All the world knew who Sapho was. And when Lady Mary and her ally Lord Hervey published anonymously *A Pop upon Pope* as a reply, the world made another shrewd guess. Pope was a dangerous man to quarrel with, and Lady Mary should have known better than to rush into print against such an adversary. It was all very unpleasant, and Elizabeth was much scandalized. 'Lady Shadwell,' she wrote to her mother, 'saw Lady Wortley Montagu at Venice where she now resides, and asked her what made her leave England; she told them the reason was people had grown so stupid she could not endure their company, all England was infected with dullness; by-the-bye what she means by insupportable

dullness is her husband, for it seems she never intends to come back while he lives. A husband may be but a dull creature to one of Lady Mary's sprightly genius, but methinks even her vivacity might accommodate itself to living in the kingdom with him ; she is a woman of great family merit ; she has banished her children, abandoned her husband. I suppose as she cannot reach Constantinople she will limit her ambition to an intrigue with the Pope or the Doge of Venice.'

Lady Mary succeeded in reaching Constantinople, and wrote some letters to her friends which are even more entertaining than Horace Walpole's and remain the most brilliant records that exist of society in the eighteenth century.

Her son was in many ways the double of Tom Lyttelton. To Tom's cleverness and dissipation Edward Wortley Montagu added a vein of eccentricity inherited from his mother. He ran away from Winchester twice, and on the second occasion was recovered from Lisbon. He ultimately reached Paris, where he was imprisoned eleven days in the Chatelet for cheating a Jew at faro. After this his adventures were mainly learned and amorous.

He eloped with a Miss Ashe, bigamously married Caroline Dormer, and then deserted her for a Nubian slave girl. It needed some courage for Elizabeth Montagu to befriend the young man. All over Europe and the East there were intrigues, none lasting very long, and all resulting in an increase of his steadily growing illegitimate family. With a quaint touch he was to bequeath these 'little beggars' to his cousin Edward Montagu's humanity.

In contrast to these rather discreditable episodes Edward Wortley was a great scholar, a contributor of learned papers to the Royal Society, and an authority on Rabbinical lore. His ultimate adoption of the costume and habits of a Turk, and the extraordinary household he maintained somehow complete this incredible picture. Elizabeth Montagu and her husband never quite knew what to make of him. His own parents had less doubt. His father left him a beggarly thousand a year, his mother left him one guinea.

5

THE 'WORLD' IN THOSE DAYS retired from the fatigues of the season to a 'spa.' From December to May the Town was full; people went to the Opera, to Ranelagh, or to a water party at Vauxhall. Then young and old in heavy family coaches they trundled along the road to Bath or Tunbridge Wells. Elizabeth Montagu went with them, sometimes as a water-drinker, for in later life she suffered from 'the spasms', but more often than not because it was the thing to do, and she was certain of finding her friends there. Health and pleasure can now be found at the end of twenty-four hours' luxury in a blue train. Elizabeth's journey to Bath was accomplished in four days by sending the heavy coach ahead with the baggage and following it in a light 'whisky', 'a one horse chair of the construction of Sir Richard Jebb . . . a most delightful machine in fair weather.' Tunbridge was nearer but not so pleasant. You only went there if you were really ill. Elizabeth had very little patience with the valetudinarians. 'The morning after I arrived I went to the Ladies' Coffee House where I heard of nothing but rheumatism in the shoulder, the sciatica in the hip, and the gout in the toe. . . . I began to fancy myself in the hospitals or infirmaries; I never saw such an assembly of disorder.' Bath was more 'select'. It was then no bigger than Cavendish Square, Portman

Square and Portland Place, all linked together and forming a little city. For its fashionable visitors Nash designed 'the Crescent' at the foot of some small grass-covered hills. After the laxity of life during the season the ritual of taking the cure seriously was a relief; and all your friends were sipping the tepid waters in the Pump Room with you.

Elizabeth Montagu hired a house in the Crescent, and from there she would write characteristic letters about the visitors to old Mr Montagu, who could not abide the place and rarely went with her.

As I do not love any Town but our Capital, I should think being out of reach of the misses who strutt about in a morning in Riding dresses and uniforms and the Macaronies who trip in pumps and with Parasols over their heads, I should think it the better, but in bad weather the situation must be much exposed. If the sun is so powerful as to be dangerous to Misses beauty she does not retire to her chamber till the fervour of the Noon is over, but takes her umbrella; if dripping rains, snow, or hail threaten to impair the gloss of her apparel, and spoil her shoes, she adds a pair of pattens to her equipment, and if the North East wind rages she takes shelter in a Mans surtout coat. The decent ladies have none of her worship. The Goddess Trivia has all the devotion of her heart, and whole sacrifice of her time. Alas what wives, mothers and mistresses of families will this Academy furnish!

A quiet sober woman is a rarity in these times. How the misses waddle and straddle and strut and swagger about the streets here, one arm a kimbo, the other swinging; the dear creatures wear short great coats like my pitmens wives in Northd.

I never saw such a set of people as appear in the

publick rooms, their dress is most elaborately ugly. A frisseur is employ'd three hours in a morning to make a young lady look like a Virgin Hottentot or Squaw, all art ends in giving them the ferocious air of uncomb'd savages. I met a young man who I took for one of the Cherokee Kings lately arrived but was assured he was an Irish beau who was to begin the Ball. . . .

Elizabeth never really liked Bath and its cosmopolitan crowds, but her friend Mrs Vesey went there every year, and to her one season Elizabeth had sent her cousin, Laurence Sterne. The reverend author of *Tristram Shandy* had married Elizabeth's cousin, and although the two women never got on, Sterne much admired his 'cosin Montague'. Elizabeth was a little sceptical of the wisdom of her cousin's marriage, but on the whole she was optimistic. 'He was a great rake but being japanned and married has varnished his character.'

Neither ordination nor marriage curbed Sterne's activities. He left his parish to a curate, and his wife and daughter in the south of France, while he carried on wild flirtations with Mrs Vesey and Eliza Draper, and (in 1760) published the first part of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gent.* Its clever mixture of insinuation and buffoonery with character and sentiment was immensely popular. Sterne discovered in it a sure source of income, and for the next six years kept on publishing more and more 'Shandy' as the demand for it grew and his own demands became more pressing. It became more indecent and eccentric as the inventive powers of the author began to tire.

Elizabeth read the book and was genuinely shocked. For Sterne himself she had a sort of half-hearted affection ;

she rather pitied him his shrewish wife. But his wit never atoned in her eyes for the indecency of his books. 'I have not,' she writes to her sister, 'seen the great Tristram since his return except at the Drawing Room, where he told me he left you pretty well. To tell you truth I was ashamed to hold long converse there with the author of a tawdry book. He has since called at my door, but I am obliged to reserve many mornings for business or quiet.'

But no one else took this puritanical view. Tristram became a 'lion' in London, a friend of the great, and a diner-out. In the intervals of literary composition he was always pursuing some woman or other. His famous love attack upon Lord Bute's daughter, Lady Percy, from the Mount Coffee House is well known; but at Bath, where he went for his health, he philandered with Mrs Vesey and at least two or three others, 'playing at romance and calling it love, playing at love and calling it friendship.'

Under the strain of these considerable activities his health broke down and he was advised that only the south of France could save him. He went, and the fruit of his wanderings was *The Sentimental Journey*. *Tristram* was a 'best seller' of the day. *The Sentimental Journey* took London by storm with its mixture of the old ingredients with pretty vignettes of southern manners and scenes.

FROM LAURENCE STERNE

Upon my soul, I know not whether my cosin Montague subscribed to my sentimental travels or no—if she did not—she ought—but I think she did—be that

as it may—I have been able to procure a set upon Impl Paper before the publication, I mean it civilly, to lay it at her feet, wch I shd have done in person had not it been too late in the day before I could get them back from the Press.

Mr Sterne presents his comps to Mr Montague, and is with just sense of all favours, Dear madam yr faithful & obliged

L. Sterne

Elizabeth never forgave him *Tristram Shandy*. She used to talk to him severely, 'and he would shed penetent tears, which seem'd to shew he erred from levity, not malice.'

Tristram's repentances were a trifle too brief and too frequent to be very real. When Elizabeth refused to console him, he turned to Mrs Vesey.

Mrs Vesey was another of the most considerable hostesses of the day. Opinions differed as to Elizabeth Montagu ; as we have seen, praise and criticism came her way in equal proportions. But there was only one opinion of Mrs Vesey. She was charming. Possessed of nothing like Elizabeth's learning or wit, and in no sense a contributor to any learned work, Mrs Vesey was one of those admirable people born into this world solely for the purpose of evoking all that is best in others.

She surpassed Mrs Montagu, without making any effort to rival her. In Mrs Vesey's Blue Room in Bolton Row (now Clarges Street) there may have been less brilliance and impressiveness, but there was certainly more intimacy and charm. Mrs Carter, reduced to wondering at the success with which she managed her assemblies, found the secret of it in 'the infinite deal of

attention she bestowed in adapting herself to the feelings of others and interesting each individual as a principal and distinguished guest.'

At Elizabeth Montagu's the guests sat in a semicircle round the fire with the hostess at the head of it, 'where all could see her,' and the most distinguished guest on her immediate right. There Mrs Montagu 'reasoned and harrangued' at great length, and here it was that Fanny Burney, then a *débutante* in the houses of the great, first observed her. Everybody was expected to be witty—and naturally enough in such an atmosphere nobody ever was. 'Her smile,' said Miss Burney, speaking of Mrs Montagu, 'though most generally benignant, was rarely gay; and her liveliest sallies had a something of anxiety rather than hilarity—till their success was ascertained by applause.' Mrs Vesey abhorred formalities. She was so afraid that her guests would unconsciously form the Montagu circle that she went to any lengths to prevent it. Small sofas and chairs were pushed pell-mell about her rooms, and Mrs Vesey herself, in typical Hibernian bewilderment, with two or three ear trumpets hanging from her wrists or slung about her neck, darted from group to group in her anxiety to take part in everything that was going on. Her absent-mindedness and forgetfulness added to the attractions of this Bolton Row Bohemianism. She sometimes hardly remembered her own name, and she once declaimed against second marriages to a lady of quality who had been twice married, and although Mr Vesey was her own second husband. When at last reminded of it, she only exclaimed: 'Bless me, my dear, I had quite forgotten it.'

6

AT ONE OF THESE PARTIES, or perhaps even earlier, Mrs Montagu first met Dr Johnson.

To find Johnson a regular attendant at the tea-table is not altogether surprising. Boswell quite often describes his fondness for the society of ladies and the pains he took to keep in their good books. What does surprise us, however, is his popularity with the ladies themselves. He thought talkative men a nuisance ; talkative women he thought an abomination. To a lady who observed that women surpassed men in epistolary correspondence and were most pleasing when in conversation, he replied : 'No, Madam, I think they are most pleasing when they hold their tongues.'

The Doctor's first visit to Hill Street seems to have taken place in 1762. Mrs Montagu observed him closely. In a letter to Lord Bath she writes :

On Saturday when I came home from an airing I found a card signifying that Mr Johnson would wait on me that evening, he came early and staid late so I had much of his conversation. He has a great deal of wit and humour but the pride of knowledge and the fastidiousness of wit makes him hard to please in books, so that he seems to take pleasure in few authors for which I pity him. I believe he is not hard to please in conversation, for I hear he expresses himself delighted with the evening

he pass'd here, and some of my friends tell me that since Polyphemus was in love there has not been so glorious a conquest as I have made over Mr Johnson. He has many virtues and wit and learning enough to make a dozen agreeable companions but a pride of talent always hurts and pains me.

The Doctor was just as observant. 'Mrs Montagu,' he told Mrs Thrale, 'is par pluribus. Conversing with her you may find variety in one'—a declaration which needed some courage, for the two good ladies hated each other with the utmost cordiality and particularly over Johnson's divided allegiance. In spite, however, of his attachment to Mrs Thrale, Johnson seems to have been a frequent visitor at Hill Street, and the blue-stocking assemblies at first revolved round him. Johnson enjoyed himself hugely. 'One evening at Mrs Montagu's,' writes Dr Maxwell, 'where a splendid company was assembled, consisting of the most eminent literary characters, I thought Johnson seemed highly pleased with the respect and attention that were shown him and asked him on our return home if he was not highly gratified by his visit. "No Sir," said he, "not highly gratified, yet I do not recollect to have passed many evenings with fewer objections".' He professed unbounded admiration for her as a hostess and a benefactress.

FROM SAMUEL JOHNSON

MADAM,

And so you are alarmed, naughty Lady; you might have known that I was ill enough when Mr Thrale brought you my excuse. Could you think I had missed the honour of being at your table for any slight reason?

But you have too many to miss any one of us and I am proud to be remembered at last.

I am much better. A little cough still remains which will not confine me. To houses of great delicacy like yours I am not willing to bring it.

Now, dear Madam, we must talk of business. Poor Davis, the bankrupt Bookseller is soliciting his friends to collect a small sum for the repurchase of part of his household stuff. Several of them gave him five guineas. It would be an honour to him to owe part of his relief to Mrs Montagu. Let me thank you once more for your enquiry ; you have perhaps among your numerous train not one that values a kind word or a kind look more than, Madam, your most humble servant,

SAM JOHNSON

March 5th 1778

But when it came to authorship the Doctor refused to allow personal admiration to warp his judgment. We shall refer later to Mrs Montagu's *Essay on Shakespeare* and of the controversies it aroused ; but Johnson's criticism was not quite so flattering as some of his letters.

Reynolds : I think that Essay does her honour.

Johnson : Sir : it does her honour but it would do nobody else honour. I have not indeed read it all. But when I take up the end of a web and find it packthread I do not expect by looking further to find embroidery. Sir, I will venture to say there is not one sentence of true criticism in her book.

Garrick : But, Sir, surely it shews how much Voltaire has mistaken Shakespeare which nobody else has done.

Johnson : Sir, nobody else has thought it worth while. And what merit is there in that ? You may as well praise a schoolmaster for whipping a boy who has construed ill. No Sir, there is no real criticism in it : none showing the beauty of thought as formed on the workings of the human heart.

Boswell describes this as Johnson's honest opinion, 'unbiassed by any proud jealousy of a woman intruding herself into the chair of criticism,' thereby suggesting what has probably already occurred to our minds. The Doctor's own Shakespeare on its rather belated appearance received even stronger criticism than Mrs Montagu's, and therefore he was in no mood to welcome a rival publicist. He would allow no merit to the Essay at all. One day at Sir Joshua's table, when it was related that Mrs Montagu, in an excess of compliment to the author of a modern tragedy, had exclaimed : 'I tremble for Shakespeare,' Johnson said : 'When Shakespeare has got —— for his rival and Mrs Montagu for his defender he is in a poor state indeed.'

But in January 1781 a sudden and terrific storm burst the bonds of their friendship and severed for some time all communication between Portman Square and Streatham. There ensued a violent quarrel in which the friends of both sides became involved against their wills.

Elizabeth Montagu's admiration for Lord Lyttelton has already been referred to. It was an admiration which extended beyond the man to his books, and she exacted from her friends an uncompromising adherence. When,

therefore, Dr Johnson published the last volume of his *Lives of the Poets*, the *bas bleu* coterie turned eagerly to the biography of Lyttelton to see what the most considerable critic of the day had got to say about him.

Of Lyttelton's poems Johnson wrote little but to the point: 'They have nothing to be despised, but little to be admired.' An even harsher judgement was pronounced on the *Dialogues of the Dead*, to which it will be remembered Elizabeth Montagu was a contributor: 'When they were first published,' wrote Johnson, 'they were kindly commended by the critical Reviewers and poor Lyttelton with humble gratitude returned, in a note which I have read, acknowledgments which can never be proper since they must be paid either for flattery or for justice.'

Lyttelton had only been dead eight years and his memory was still honoured and treasured by his friends. Johnson's attitude of 'compassionate contempt' stung them to the quick. Elizabeth was furious at the insult to her beloved Lyttelton, and declared she would never talk to Johnson again.

Horace Walpole was delighted over this storm in a tea-cup, and took pains to foment the feud: 'At a blue-stocking meeting held by Lady Lucan, Mrs Montagu and Johnson kept at different ends of the chamber and set up altar against altar there. She told me as a mark of her high displeasure that she would never ask him to dinner again. I took her aside and fomented the quarrel and wished I could have made Dagon and Ashtaroth scold in coptic.'

Johnson was impenitent, although he felt the loss of her friendship severely: 'Mrs Montagu has dropped

me,' he told Boswell. 'Now, Sir, there are people whom one should like very well to drop but would not wish to be dropped by.' The breach was never really healed, although on the death of Dr Johnson's blind friend Mrs Williams, Elizabeth wrote him a civil letter and the Doctor visited her at Portman Square once more. But this was only a year before the doctor's own death in 1784, and when he was no longer present the blue-stocking gatherings lost much of their character, and degenerated into 'crushes' of fashionable *literati*.

Meanwhile the quarrel with the blue-stockings waxed warm. In the forefront of the dispute was a Mr Weller Pepys, a timid man, but a great friend of Lyttelton. On a Wednesday in this fatal June he happened to dine at Mrs Thrale's, and to his dismay found Johnson there. The Doctor, who longed for a scene, fell foul of him at once. Fanny Burney kept a record in her diary of what happened at Streatham on that momentous day :

'I never saw Dr Johnson really in a passion but then : and dreadful indeed it was to see. He so red, poor Mr Pepys so pale !' 'But how did it begin ? What did he say ?' 'Oh Dr Johnson came to the point without much ceremony. He called out, aloud before a large company at dinner : "What have you to say, Sir, to me, or of me ? Come forth man ! I hear you object to my life of Lord Lyttelton. What are your objections ? If you have anything to say, let's hear it. Come forth man when I call you !"' 'What a call indeed ! Why then he fairly bullied him into a quarrel !' 'Yes and I was the more sorry because Mr Pepys had begged of me before they met not to let Lord Lyttelton be mentioned. . . .' 'It

was behaving ill to Mrs Thrale, certainly, to quarrel in her house.' 'Yes; but he never repeated it, though he wished of all things to have gone through just such another scene with Mrs Montagu, and to refrain was an act of heroic forbearance.' 'Why I rather wonder he did not; for she was the head of the set of Lytteltonians.' 'Oh he knows that; he calls Mr Pepys only her prime minister.' 'And what does he call her?' '"Queen," to be sure! "Queen of the Blues!"'

In a century which was vain and shallow and often insincere, and in which scepticism was the only becoming attitude of mind for the man or woman of *ton*, it is pleasant to record a loyalty of this kind. Elizabeth Montagu, like so many women who have been unable to lavish affection on a husband or a family, gave hers to her friends. Often it was largely uncritical, sometimes it made her a little ridiculous; but invariably she entered the lists to defend her friends when any one attacked their reputations or their achievements. She could not, perhaps, join in Molly Lepel's boast of never having lost a friend except by death; but her loyalty, and at the same time her indifference to any attack made upon herself, attached many men and women to her in devoted admiration.

Many of them, of course, looked upon her more as a patron than as a friend—and did not scruple as occasion arose to press their necessities upon her. Again and again through her correspondence we find a letter of appeal, an appeal for a subscription to a new book, an appeal for help from some needy genius, the granting of a pension to some relative or some obscure man of letters. To such

requests the purse of the ' Queen of the Blues ' was always open. And to those who might scorn to accept in cash what they might receive in kind, there was her hospitable table ' covered with pellucid linen and a thousand glittering vases '—presenting to the view all the requirements of a perfect breakfast.

It would have been unlike her if she had remained satisfied with entertaining exalted or indigent men of letters. Every May Day any sweep who chose to present himself at Portman Square between one and four in the afternoon was regaled with roast beef and pudding on the lawn. When at Denton in Northumberland, she entertained the miners and their wives in a manner which contemporaries thought affected, although this may draw a smile in these sophisticated days of co-operation between master and man.

' I had the gratification of seeing 150 of my black friends eat rice pudding and boiled beef as long as they could cram ; two nights before I had another party of 96, another 60.' Elizabeth Montagu in her practical way, long before the days of Robert Owen or of Conciliation Boards, had set about solving the problems of labour at least as far as her own industries were concerned.

7

MRS MONTAGU WAS DUBBED 'Queen of the Blues' by Dr Johnson, but controversy still rages round the origin of the word 'blue-stocking' itself. Some think that the 'Blue-Stocking Club' was merely a descendant of a Venetian 'Société de la Calza' of the fifteenth century whose members wore fantastic stockings, 'Calze turchine,' when they assembled for literary discussion. This theory has little to recommend it. On the other hand, were these blue stockings merely a passing fashion—an eighteenth-century *article de Paris* as Dr Doran suggests? It is difficult to believe that our Ladies would have adopted them for such a flimsy reason; besides, there is no contemporary evidence of a sudden craze among women of fashion for stockings of this colour. Neither the Chudleigh nor the Gunnings nor any other fashionable beauties are reported to have worn them, and had they been *le dernier cri* we may be quite certain we should have heard about them. It now seems reasonably clear that the person who gave the name to these assemblies of blue-stockings was, oddly enough, a man—and no less a man than Benjamin Stillingfleet, naturalist and philosopher. One day about the year 1750 he was at Bath taking the waters, and received an invitation to a literary meeting at Mrs Vesey's. He declined to accept it, so Fanny Burney tells us, from not

being in the habit of displaying a proper equipment for an evening assembly. '"Pho! Pho!" cried Mrs Vesey, with her well-known yet always original simplicity, while she looked inquisitively at him and his accoutrement, "don't mind dress! Come in your blue stockings." With which words, humorously repeating them as he entered the apartment of the chosen coterie, Mr Stillingfleet claimed permission to appear according to order. And these words ever after were fixed in playful stigma upon Mrs Vesey's assemblies.'

In a matter of this kind we must proceed with extreme caution, and even Fanny Burney, reliable witness though she might be, would not carry complete conviction were she not confirmed by Elizabeth Montagu's own correspondence. In 1757 she wrote to Dr Monsey about Stillingfleet: 'I assure you our philosopher is so much a man of pleasure he has left off his old friends and his blue stockings and is at operas and other gay assemblies every night.' It was Stillingfleet's appearance at these literary parties of Mrs Montagu, Mrs Vesey, Mrs Ord and Mrs Boscawen, that led bluff old Admiral Boscawen to call them derisively the 'Blue-Stocking Club.' The joke was a good one; the name stuck.

A most exasperating doubt exists as to whether any of these ladies themselves ever wore blue stockings. Matthew Montagu was once indeed told by an unkindly critic to 'darn his aunt's blue stockings'; but it is unfair to support such a grave charge on evidence of this kind. Did the Queen of the Blues and her friends wear the hated symbols of spinsterhood, of bespectacled learning?

Mr Reginald Blunt refuses to decide the point and

adds to our perplexity by quoting Lady Crewe as saying that she and all the members of the club adopted blue silk stockings from Madame de Polignac, they being then the newest fashion from Paris. This, as we have said, is unlikely, and on the whole the reader must take it, although it may cost him the loss of one further illusion of his childhood, that neither the Queen of the Blues nor any of her subjects ever wore these stockings.

But whether or no blue stockings were worn, it would be quite wrong to imagine these parties as gatherings of erudite maiden ladies earnestly elaborating dry theses. In an ordinary drawing-room the two sexes ranged themselves on opposite sides of the room, and the ladies were left to twirl their shuttles and amuse themselves by conversing as they could. 'By what little I could overhear,' wrote Mrs Carter on one of these occasions, 'our opposites were discoursing on the old English poets and this subject did not seem so much beyond a female capacity but that we might have been indulged with a share in it.'

At the blue-stocking parties these absurd barriers were broken down; men and women would meet each other freely, and their only distinguishing characteristic was that cards and politics were banished from them and informal literary discussion encouraged. Hannah More gives us a pleasant picture of one of these gatherings:

I had yesterday the pleasure of dining in Hill Street Berkeley Square, at a certain Mrs Montagu's, a name not totally obscure. The party consisted of herself, Mrs Carter, Dr Johnson, Solander, and Matty, Mrs Boscawen, Miss Reynolds, and Sir Joshua (the idol of every company); some other persons of high rank and less wit, and your

humble servant,—a party that could not have disgraced the table of Laelius, or of Atticus. I felt myself a worm, the more a worm for the consequence which was given me, by mixing me with such a society ; but as I told Mrs Boscawen, and with great truth, I had an opportunity of making an experiment of my heart, by which I learnt that I was not envious, for I certainly did not repine at being the meanest person in the company.

Mrs Montagu received me with the most encouraging kindness ; she is not only the finest genius, but the finest Lady I ever saw ; she lives in the highest style of magnificence ; her apartments and table are in the most splendid taste : but what baubles are these when speaking of a Montagu ! her form (for she has no body) is delicate even to fragility ; her countenance the most animated in the world ; the sprightly vivacity of fifteen, with the judgment and experience of a Nestor. But I fear she is hastening to decay very fast ; her spirits are so active, that they must soon wear out the little frail receptacle that holds them. Mrs Carter has in her person a great deal of what the gentlemen mean when they say such an one is a 'poetical lady' ; however, independently of her great talents and learning, I like her much ; she has affability, kindness and goodness ; and I honour her heart even more than her talents : but I do not like one of them better than Mrs Boscawen ; she is at once polite, learned, judicious, and humble ; Mrs Palk tells me her letters are thought not inferior to Mrs Montagu's. She regretted (so did I) that so many suns could not possibly shine at one time ; but we are to have a smaller party, where, from fewer luminaries, there may emanate a clearer, steadier, and more beneficial light. Dr Johnson asked me how I liked the new tragedy of Braganza. I was afraid to speak before them all, as I knew a diversity of opinion prevailed among the company : however, as I thought it a less evil to dissent from the opinion of a fellow creature, than to tell a falsity, I ventured to give

my sentiments ; and was satisfied with Johnson's answering, ' You are right, madam.'

These parties formed, as it were, little oases in a desert of heavy gambling and deep drinking, with which society had amused itself ever since Lady Shrewsbury first introduced card-parties in the early days of Queen Anne. The ladies of Hill Street and Bolton Row set their faces sternly against the excesses of White's and Almack's. Small wonder then that their net was not cast as widely as it might have been, and that those who preferred the excitement of *faro* or of *loo* gave the blue-stocking coteries a wide berth. Elizabeth had never been a card-player, although Lord Bath, who dearly loved a quiet game of whist, had seduced her for a time. Her lapse from grace was not a long one, and card-playing was once more forbidden, with the unfortunate result that the gamesters never visited her house, and that men like Fox and Sheridan and Chesterfield never contributed anything to the ' causeries ' of the blue-stockings. Unfortunate perhaps for posterity, but no doubt fortunate for the gatherings themselves.

Hannah More wrote a sprightly poem, ' The Bas Bleu ', to celebrate the victory of the blue-stockings :

> Long was society o'er-run
> By whist, that desolating Hun ;
> Long did quadrille despotic sit,
> That Vandal of colloquial wit ;
> And conversation's setting light
> Lay half-obscur'd in Gothic night ;
> At length the mental shades decline,
> Colloquial wit begins to shine ;

Genius prevails, and conversation
Emerges into reformation.
The vanquish'd triple crown to you
Boscawen sage, bright Montagu,
Divided fell ;—your cares in haste
Rescued the ravag'd realms of taste ;
And Lyttelton's accomplish'd name ;
And witty Pulteney shar'd the fame ;
The men, not bound by pedant rules,
Nor ladies precieuses ridicules :
For polish'd Walpole shew'd the way,
How wits may be both learn'd and gay ;
And Carter taught the female train,
The deeply wise are never vain ;
And, she, who Shakespeare's wrongs redrest
Prov'd that the brightest are the best . . .

Horace Walpole and the Strawberry Hill clique frequented neither of the rival entertainments and cast their censures on both. 'The gaming at Almack's,' he reports, 'which has taken the *pas* of White's is worthy of the decline of our Empire. Lord Stavordale not one-and-twenty lost £11,000 there last Thursday, but recovered it by one great hand at hazard ; he swore a great oath—"Now, if I had been playing deep I might have won millions."' 'Lord Chesterfield has had a stroke of apoplexy,' Mrs Delany wrote in 1756. 'It is generally thought the anxious life he has led among gamesters has occasioned this stroke.'

What attraction was there for men of this kind among the quiet intellectuals who assembled to drink tea or coffee under the presidency of Mrs Montagu ? There were other entertainments, but to those you went at the peril of your good name and reputation. If you liked

that kind of thing, there were the merry monks of Medmenham, Lord Sandwich, Sir Francis Dashwood and John Wilkes, who founded the Hell-Fire Club and astonished the Town with their bestial orgies.

And then there were the parties of Elizabeth Chudleigh, or the Night Club run by Teresa Cornelys in the respectable suburb of Soho Square. Rumour said it was patronised by the young Princes and by the Queen's Maids of Honour ; enough to make it out of bounds to all decent people.

The politicians, as we have seen, kept religiously away from the blue-stockings. Gibbon avoided them. Adam Smith, Beattie, Boswell, lived more or less permanently in Edinburgh. Horace Walpole, entrenched at Strawberry Hill, used them only as foils for a sneer or a satire. Mrs Carter lived at Deal, Mrs Thrale at Streatham, and Fanny Burney soon retired from them and became virtually a prisoner in attendance on the Queen.

The blue-stocking parties, therefore, were never as celebrated as those sister assemblies in Paris of the Marquise du Deffand, Mme Geoffrin or Mlle de Lespinasse. The national habits of the two countries had something to do with this difference, because Englishmen never flocked to the capital as the French have done from the earliest times.

'The Circle in London,' Wraxall remarks, 'was from various causes necessarily much more contracted than in France, where every person distinguished by talents with few exceptions commonly resided altogether in Paris.'

Distance and the Englishman's innate love for the country kept many of the *literati* on their estates or

visiting friends at a distance from home. In Paris, on the other hand, the literary man could spend his week going a regular round. On Sundays and Thursdays he dined at the Baron d'Holbach's : on Mondays and Wednesdays at Mme Geoffrin's : on Tuesdays at M. Helvétius' : on Fridays he went to Mme Necker : and every evening between five and nine o'clock he was expected at Mlle de Lespinasse's.

The English are not a gregarious nation. Their virtues shine more clearly in the individual than in the crowd. And so it may not have been time and distance alone which made the lights of Bolton Row and Hill Street pale before the glow of the Couvent St Joseph or the Rue St Honoré. The spirit and character of the presiding genius were different ; in Paris the salons sparkled with a brilliance to which in England they never attained.

Wraxall's description of Elizabeth Montagu as ' the Madame du Deffand of the English Capital ' was true in a sense. True, that is to say, in the sense that among all the literary hostesses of the time Mrs Montagu was the most considerable. But there the comparison ends ; the Englishwoman was both a greater and a lesser light than her French rival. She excelled in accomplishment and in knowledge. But in sympathy and understanding, in all the qualities of the human heart, Madame du Deffand was supreme. Mrs Vesey had her personal charm, but without her intellectual qualities. Elizabeth Montagu, with more intellectual eminence, fell far behind her in her capacity for attracting the devotion of others.

That there was any rivalry between the two capitals it would be absurd to declare. They often exchanged

ambassadors. Elizabeth Montagu visited Paris in 1776 soon after her husband's death, and returned an humble admirer of the *beaux esprits* of the salons. 'Milaidy Montaigue' was well received, and at Chaillot she rented a house where in her turn she entertained the *literati* of the French Capital.

Among her acquaintance were the Neckers, and at their house at supper one night she met Madame du Deffand. Unfortunately, no stranger has preserved an account of the meeting between these rivals, but here is Elizabeth Montagu's: 'There was of the party a Madame de Dufens much celebrated for her wit, she had desired to be introduced to me, was exceedingly obliging and I was charmed with her and the more as she is 4 score years of age, totally blind, and is as gay and lively as 18. She ate a very hearty supper and I left her behind me at one in the morning. I am to sup with her on Wednesday.'

On the other hand, Mme du Deffand writing to Horace Walpole described Mrs Montagu in a manner which must have comforted him at Strawberry Hill: 'Je vois quelque fois madame Montagu; je ne la trouve pas trop pédante, mais elle fait tant d'efforts pour bien parler notre langue que sa conversation est pénible.'

Elizabeth Montagu certainly did not impress the French. 'Pas trop pédante' rather indicates that the Frenchwoman was pleasantly surprised to discover a learned lady who was not a blue-stocking; it may also indicate that Elizabeth Montagu's irresistible desire to 'show off' had not been very well received.

One contemporary picture of Mrs Montagu survives

which, although it belongs to an earlier date, may conveniently be given here. Mme du Boccage in her *Lettres sur L'Angleterre* described her in 1750 :

We thus breakfasted to-day at Mylady Montaigu's in a closet lined with painted paper of Pekin and adorned with the prettiest Chinese furniture, a long table covered with pellucid linen and a thousand glittering vases presented to the view coffee, chocolate, biscuits, cream, butter, bread toasted in many ways and exquisite tea.

You must understand that good tea is to be had in London only. The mistress of the house, tho' worthy to be served at the table of the gods poured it out herself as the custom demands, which to obey, English Ladies put on a close fitting, marvellously becoming dress, a white apron, a pretty little straw hat, and that they wear not only within doors but even along the Mall at noon when like so many nymphs they take their favourite midday walk in St James Park.

Mrs Montagu liked the French and enjoyed her journey, although she criticised everything she saw freely enough. She found that the only object of a Frenchwoman's life was pleasure, and that they passed from the toilet table to the theatre, and then on to suppers and parties. What annoyed her most was the care with which they cultivated all the little graces. Elizabeth preferred her own life, with its mixture of business with pleasure and its perpetual change from the bustle of the town to the calm of the country.

Paris was then on the brink of the Revolution. Thirteen years later, on a day in July, the Bastille was to lie in ruins, and with it all that gilded society of which Elizabeth Montagu was now for a short time a member.

In Paris such fears were far from her as, dressed in the height of fashion, her complexion rouged to the hue of scarlet fever, she went to see *Zaïre* with the Neckers ; or on a quiet July afternoon took a gentle walk with Monsieur de Buffon along the banks of the Seine.

8

THE QUEEN OF THE BLUES then (if our reading of her character is accepted) was first of all a woman of society and of fashion. Blue-stocking, in the worst modern sense of the word, she never was, although in an age when illiteracy was considered part of woman's charm, her attainments seemed exceptional. In these enlightened days, when women have become instructed at the expense of their education, we might call Elizabeth Montagu a bookish woman. What time she could spare from the cares of the world she spent among her books, and her own intimate circle of friendship consisted largely of men and women whose interests were of the same kind.

Her own reading at all times seems to have been prodigious. At fourteen she quoted Molière in her letters, read Horace and Longinus in French, and possessed a nodding acquaintance with Greek. We still find her in her old age with failing eyesight working six hours a day on the Memoirs of de Noailles and the Hardwicke State Papers. The result of this learning showed itself in her letters, of which such a vast number survives. When she was still in her teens she knew that her letters were circulated and were much admired. Her favourite friends, Lord Bath and Lord Lyttelton, repeatedly urged her to

allow them to be published, and after a time it becomes quite clear that Elizabeth Montagu writes her letters with an eye to posterity. They become, therefore, more and more unreadable. What can one expect when a woman is persistently told that she is 'the most agreeable correspondent in the world'? She believed it.

When we compare Mrs Montagu's letters with the answers of her correspondents, the difference in the characters of the various members of the coterie immediately becomes apparent. Elizabeth's letters are so varied that it is obvious that she possessed no definite style, but merely adapted her thoughts and her manner of expressing them to the temperament of the person to whom they were addressed. She knew how to use all the 'stops' and could play a variation in any theme she chose. Lyttelton's letters are unfailingly pompous. Walpole accused him of talking 'heroics through his nose'; he certainly wrote interminable heroics to Elizabeth. Lord Bath was skittish; he never missed an opportunity of being suggestive, and Elizabeth Montagu in true feminine vein rather liked it but took some pains not to let him know it. Mrs Carter was dignified and leisurely, whether she was writing about the weather or Epictetus, or her own domestic concerns. Her letters were never affected; their *tempo* always remained the same.

TO MISS TALBOT

Canterbury, May 14th 1747

I should have long ago done myself the pleasure of writing to you, dear Miss Talbot, but have been in a

constant hurry of one sort or another ever since I received your's. No doubt you have a great curiosity to know what I have been about, so I shall proceed to inform you, as one kind of nothingness is as good as another. In the first place I have been out of the world somewhere, at an infinite distance from people and things, in the country, where I spent by vulgar computation of time, a week, but in my own, a year. To be sure I was in a house very pleasantly situated, and the hogs grunted, and the pigs squeaked, the toads croaked, and all was mighty rural and pretty. Besides, I was really in a very agreeable family, and was carried there by very agreeable friends ; and yet whatever possessed me, I took it into my head to be extremely restless and uneasy. It seemed to be a place from which I could not conveniently run away, and so fancied myself in the condition of some unfortunate damsel in a romance confined to an enchanted palace, and I had absolutely lost all idea of my being in any European country.—At last I returned to Canterbury, to my great joy, and ever since, between head-aches and fluttering up and down upon the face of the earth for joy, that I was once more among men, women, and children, I have had little leisure for writing . . .

Mrs Vesey's letters were staccato in the extreme. She never used a comma, very rarely a stop ; and she succeeded in conveying into her letters the same confusion of ideas which she exhibited in her Blue Room in Bolton Row.

TO MRS MONTAGU

Lucan 1781

MY DEAREST DEAR FRIEND,

I went to the Cottage this fine morning hoping for uninterrupted quiet to write to you who are the joy

of my heart no sound but the dashing of the River—when I was roused from my reverie by Col Putterels Band—the wicker latchet you may be sure made no resistance against the conqueror of 45 string Jack—the Misses complained the waterfall was melancholy so I whisk'd them a tour on foot and Cabriole through Scenes worthy the fortunate Islands as to melancholy I agreed with the Misses when I passed through the rural and the groves where youthful Fancy had so often wander'd with delight —I cou'd make a grievous story of the decay of every Avenue to the mind but that I am tired of Voltaires Chronicle of his age in every letter—the mighty Champion for incredulity seems to tremble in every line when he is about to jump the Life to come alas he had tumbled down Hope into the bottomless gulf before him — . . . where I dined a few days ago the fruit was served in Wicker Baskets entwined through with Moss and stuck slightly with flower the moss will last two years—I never saw anything so pretty or that became fruit so much—it was the desert of Flora and Pomona and I thought of nothing but how beautiful and becoming it wou'd be in the Dining Room where both of these ladies have done their best to form the drapery over the windows sweet Gregory go and form the Baskets. . . .

and much more in the same strain.

We have already said that Elizabeth wrote the last three essays in Lyttelton's *Dialogues of the Dead.* Horace Walpole called them 'Dead Dialogues,' and the most that can be said for them is that Elizabeth's were no better and no worse than those which Lyttelton wrote himself. Her first was a Dialogue between Cadmus and Hercules on the comparative value to mankind of heroic strength and of the civilising arts, and is poor stuff indeed. Cadmus expounds political principles worthy

of John Stuart Mill, and Hercules has become somewhat anæmic in the transition from the ancient world to the eighteenth century. Her last, between Plutarch and a modern Book-seller, is pompous and rhetorical. Both of them contain all the worst faults of her letters, without the redeeming features of her wit and imagery.

The second, a dialogue between Mercury and a Fine Lady, is a rather sprightly satire on the young men and women of her day, somewhat in the manner of Miss Anita Loos. A Mrs Modish, summoned by the grim messenger to cross the Styx, insists upon delay as she happens to be engaged, 'absolutely engaged.' Mrs Modish's definition of *Bon Ton* became classical :

Mrs M. Oh sir, excuse me, it is one of the privileges of the *bon ton* never to define or be defined. It is the child and parent of jargon. It is—I can never tell you what it is ; but I will try to tell you what it is not. In conversation, it is not wit, in manners it is not politeness ; in behaviour it is not address ; but it is a little like them all. It can only belong to people of a certain rank, who live in a certain manner, with certain persons who have not certain virtues and who have certain vices, and who inhabit a certain part of the town. Like a place by courtesy, it gets a higher rank than the person can claim ; but those who have a legal title to precedency dare not dispute for fear of being thought not to understand the rules of politeness. Now, Sir, I have told you as much as I know of it though I have admired and aimed at it all my life.

This clever sketch became a favourite with the town —an eighteenth-century best-seller—'but some Ladies have tossed up their heads and said it was abominably

satirical.' The secret of the authorship of these Dialogues soon leaked out; Elizabeth Montagu, we can imagine, did not become more popular in Mayfair.

Her first success encouraged her to undertake something more ambitious. In the quiet years between 1760 and 1764 she was hard at work. In 1769 an *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare* was published anonymously. London became interested and curious.

It is a mistake to look upon the Essay as a work of general criticism of Shakespeare or of the Drama. Elizabeth Montagu, in the letters she wrote to her friends before it was given to the world, purposely disclaimed any such intention. It was written for a particular purpose, as a pamphlet and not as a critical dissertation.

'Both Mr Pope and Mr Johnson,' she wrote, 'have written the prettiest essays imaginable on Shakespear, but I think they have done very little in showing his excellencies in particular circumstances, and either general encomium or invective, is to me not properly criticism; both these writers aim to please rather than to teach. I had entered into a particular critique of his historical plays, and a very full one of his *Henry IV.* I have shown Mr Voltaire's injustice, and compared our Countryman with his boasted Corneille in many places where the subject bore any relation, and also shown the defects of the french Theater.'

She makes her purpose still clearer in another letter to Mrs Carter: 'I was provoked to this undertaking by the flippancy of Voltaire in great measure, and also by thinking we had erred widely from the true dramatick art.'

Bearing in mind the limited scope she had set herself,

and relating the Essay to the dramatic criticism of her time, we shall see how extremely effective this small book of hers became.

The key-note to English dramatic criticism of Shakespeare had been struck by Dryden in 1668 in his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*. Shakespeare was a glorious barbarian. Criticism wore an air of patronage, and spilt much ink lamenting that Shakespeare's rugged art was spoilt by his ignorance and bad taste. In a word he was 'a native wood-note wild,' but no dramatist.

A more extreme attack was launched by Thomas Rymer, the pious author of the *Foedera*. Rymer was deeply read in ancient drama and had discovered Aristotle. The discovery went to his head; he proceeded to indict Shakespeare for failing to keep certain rules laid down in the *Treatise of Poesie*. This was back to Aristotle with a vengeance!

'Really,' was Rymer's considered judgment, 'there is not a monkey that understands nature better, not a pug in Barbary that has not a truer taste in things than this Shakespeare whom some would top upon us for a genius.' Had he not in nearly all his plays neglected the three venerable unities—Action, Time and Place? How could drama flourish under such ignorant auspices?

Even Dryden was impressed by this pedantry. In his Preface to *Troilus and Cressida*, he threw over Shakespeare, condemned his Historical Plays for their disregard of Aristotle's Rules, and announced that Mr Rymer had discovered how defective Shakespeare and Fletcher had been in their plots.

Farquhar disembowelled the pedants in a sentence.

'Aristotle,' he declared, 'was no poet and consequently not capable of giving instruction in the art of Poetry.' As for the rules, they were merely a set of accidental observations drawn from Homer and Euripides and were not meant to be universally applied. 'Were not you the very minute before in the pit talking to a wench, and now, praesto, pass, you are spirited away to the banks of the river Nile. Surely this is a most intolerable probability! Then in the second Act with a flourish of the fiddles I change the scene to Astrakan'—'O' this is intolerable'—'Look'ee, Sir, 'tis not a jot more intolerable than the other; for you'll find that 'tis much about the same distance between Aegypt and Astrakan as it is between Drury Lane and Grand Cairo.'

Johnson in the preface to his edition of Shakespeare completed the rout. To the argument that what is performed in three hours cannot have lasted months or years, he answered that it was false that any representation is mistaken for reality. The only illusion the stage can produce is the illusion of reality, and once illusion be admitted, it does not matter to what length it extends. If a London stage stands for Alexandria in the first act, why should it not stand for Rome in the second?

All this was well accepted in England by the time Elizabeth Montagu took up the cudgels on Shakespeare's behalf; she entered the lists to defend him against the foreigner.

French dramatic criticism was completely under the influence of Voltaire. The religious sceptic was a rigid conservative in all that concerned the drama. Paradoxically, the author of *Candide* was also the firmest

upholder of the Unities. Voltaire's attitude to Shakespeare was, therefore, hostile from the start; and in addition to this he had very good reasons for decrying him and discouraging the French public from reading him, because he had 'lifted' the story of *Zaïre* from *Othello*, and used extensively the tragic scenes in Macbeth for *Mahomet*.

The obscure Rymer, therefore, became an inspired critic, and Shakespeare's plays were wild extravagances too brutal for the delicate taste of French audiences. 'Shakespeare,' he wrote, 'the creator of the English drama, had a vigorous and teeming genius, natural sometimes and sometimes sublime, but without the smallest spark of taste and without the least knowledge of the rules.' To complete his conquest of public opinion Voltaire translated 'as faithfully as possible' the first three acts of *Julius Cæsar*, containing a rather similar conspiracy to that in *Cinna*. Put side by side the French public could judge them both; and naturally enough they endorsed Voltaire's judgment. His triumph was short-lived. Other Frenchmen could also read English, and a certain Monsieur de la Place promptly set about translating some of these 'English barbarities.' The first volumes were a stupendous success. For the first time Frenchmen read Shakespeare in a faithful text, and discovered the source from which Voltaire later confessed he had plucked such few pearls as there were.

Voltaire was scandalised at this public affront to his judgment. His abuse of Shakespeare increased with the success of la Place's work. Shakespeare now became 'an intoxicated savage'; and at this stage Elizabeth

Montagu, incensed beyond measure, ventured forth with pens, ink and paper and dealt the arrogant Frenchman a few shrewd blows.

Her *Essay* was the first step in a controversy which developed into a ' Paper War ' on a small scale. She had arranged it as a collection of papers on Dramatic Poetry, the Historical Drama, and the Preternatural Beings in Shakespeare, with particular analyses of *Henry IV*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Cæsar*, and the *Cinna* of Corneille. A careful choice, these plays, and selected with an eye to her main object, which was not so much to defend Shakespeare as to attack Voltaire by carrying the war into the enemy's own camp.

Her defence of Shakespeare was what we might have expected from a woman of her temperament. Nowhere does it betray her into ecstasies ; yet, on the other hand, she indignantly refutes the heresy that he was an ignorant boor pandering to the taste of a vulgar crowd.

Elizabeth had read her Johnson, and had obviously profited considerably from it. Accepting his weighty phrase that ' the end of writing is to instruct, the end of poetry is to instruct by pleasing,' she examined her selected plays with a judicial air. To compare Shakespeare to Corneille, as Voltaire had done, was to compare a giant with a pigmy. ' I am flattered,' she wrote to Mrs Carter, ' to find that my opinion of Corneille has always agreed with yours. I will allow he is a poet but I deny his dramatic talents ; he does not possess the familiarity of dialogue, nor the art of realising characters . . . they are not men, they are mere images.' Here she was echoing

Johnson when he wrote that Shakespeare's characters are valuable as representations of universal nature in which mankind will ever see themselves reflected.

But when it came to attacking Voltaire personally, Elizabeth was well on her own ground. She read French easily. Voltaire's English had been picked up during a three-years' stay in England. Yet this was the man who dared to translate *Julius Cæsar* into French !

In a sense he brought his discomfiture on his own head by praising his translation and challenging comparison with the original. 'The rendering here given of *Julius Cæsar* is the most faithful ever made in our language from any poet, ancient or foreign. . . . Prose corresponds to prose, blank verse to blank verse, and what is familiar and low in Shakespeare's tragedy has so remained.'

A bold pronouncement like this in the author's own preface might have disarmed any critic. Yet his translation was full of inaccuracies, and Elizabeth Montagu proceeded to quote some of them. For instance, in the first scene of Act II, Brutus, hesitating before agreeing to the murder of Anthony as well as Cæsar, says :

'Our course will seem too bloody, Caius Cassius.'

Voltaire rendered this :

'Cette course aux Romans paraîtrait trop sanglante,' and added in a note—'an allusion perhaps to the Lupercal course, unless it signifies a dish at table.'

In the same play Brutus's :

'All my engagements I will construe to thee '—becomes in Voltaire's faithful text :

'Va, mes sourcils froncés prennent un air plus doux.'

There were many further evidences of the translator's ignorance of English ; Elizabeth quoted them all with huge enjoyment.

Contemporary critics almost unanimously praised the anonymous book, but the secret was guessed as soon as it was known that Stillingfleet corrected the proofs. Malone admired it ; Tom Warton thought it ' the most elegant piece of criticism this age has produced.' Praise from higher quarters was in store for the adventurous authoress. George Grenville declared her style and manner to be full of imagination, elegance and correctness, and read the Essay to his young people round the fireside. Prime Ministers do not usually carry much weight as critics, and George Grenville was certainly no Solomon. But in his pompous way he seems to have enumerated its merits.

The *Critical Review*, in its May number, was less judicious and the praise rather went to Elizabeth's head : ' The age has scarcely produced a more fair, judicious and classical performance of its kind than this Essay.' She was delighted. The mask of anonymity could now be thrown aside. Her husband was already in the secret. Now her father was introduced to his ' grand-child,' and a second edition, flying under its author's own colours, was prepared for the press.

We have already quoted Johnson's peevish criticism. ' Reynolds is fond of her book,' he told Boswell on another occasion, ' and I wonder at it for neither I, nor Beauclerk, nor Mrs Thrale could get through it.' This paragraph in Boswell created a delicious scene some years later when Mrs Thrale, who had then become Mrs Piozzi, wrote from Naples to Mrs Montagu to disavow the author.

'I do not delay a moment to declare on the contrary I have always commended it myself and heard it commended by every one else; and few things would give me more concern than to be thought incapable of tasting or unwilling to testify my opinion of its excellence.'

Horace Walpole was careful to fan such a promising controversy. 'I have just seen,' he wrote, 'a very clever letter from Mrs Piozzi to Mrs Montagu to disavow a jackanapes who has lately made a noise here, one Boswell by anecdotes of Dr Johnson. . . . The cock biographer has fixed a direct lie on the hen.'

Boswell made a very effective rejoinder by pointing out that Mrs Thrale had actually read the Journal containing the passage and had raised no objection, and there can be little doubt that Hester Piozzi's memory of Hester Thrale was a little dim by this time, and that Boswell was right and she was wrong.

Mrs Montagu's quarrel with Voltaire did not slumber. It broke out afresh in 1776 when she went on a visit to Paris. Her arrival coincided with the publication of Letourneur's complete edition of Shakespeare, dedicated to the King of France. The disciples of Ferney thought this alone an outrage to national sentiment, but when the translator described Voltaire's versions as a ridiculous travesty of the original they were up in arms.

L'Année Littéraire added fuel to the flames by publishing a rather injudicious review in which was the following: 'It is certain that Orosmane is nothing but Othello in a French habit, and that Zaïre has something of a family likeness with Desdemona. . . . *Othello* is therefore indisputably the mine from which *Zaïre* was dug up.'

This damaging *exposé* was hardly mitigated by the final paragraph which complimented the author of *Zaïre* for polishing a rough diamond. The sting was still there.

As Grimm said : 'The devotees of Ferney could not read without much ill humour a work that was to reveal to France the admirable skill with which Monsieur de Voltaire had appropriated Shakespeare's beauties and the less admirable bad faith with which he afterwards dared to translate them.'

Voltaire himself entered the fray. There was only one possible answer. He must vindicate the national honour and dismiss Shakespeare for ever from the ranks of the classical dramatists. He chose for this purpose a public sitting of the Academy on August 25th, 1776. Elizabeth Montagu came to the meeting especially to hear what he had to say. We can imagine the punctilious English lady, her patriotic ardour aflame, patiently sitting behind the twenty-four Academicians, until the more formal business was over and the more serious work of the session begun.

When d'Alembert approached the table to read Voltaire's philippic, every one knew that one of Shakespeare's most ardent champions was present, and many turned anxious glances towards her. How would this public flouting of England's National Bard be received ? All minds were in a ferment.

Elizabeth Montagu coolly described the scene in a letter to Mrs Vesey :

Then rose Mons. D'Alembert to read a most blackguard abusive invective of Mons. de Voltaires against Shakespear, the translation of whose works he appre-

hended would spoil the taste of the french Nation. He attributed to Shakespear many things he never said, he gather'd together many things the rudeness of the age allow'd him to say, and with a few mauvaises plaisanteries season'd the discourse. . . . This trash of Mons. Voltaires answer'd the great purpose of his life, to raise a momentary laugh at things that are good, and a transient scorn of men much superior to himself; but I must do that justice to the Academy and Audience, they seem'd in general displeased at the paper read. I was ask'd by an Academician if I would answer this piece of Voltaires, and he did not doubt but I could do it very well. I said M. l'Abbe Arnauld had done much better than I could, in the praises he had given to original genius, and the benefits arising from the study of them; that I remembered 60 years ago in the same Academy Old Homer had met with the same treatment with Shakespear; that they now did justice to Homer, I did not doubt but they would do so to Shakespear.

In justice to Voltaire it must be said that his abuse of Shakespeare seems to have been moderated for the occasion—although still violent. He was now admitted to the ranks of genius. At times, indeed, this Thespis even became a Sophocles; but 'Fancy, gentlemen,' concludes Voltaire, 'that Louis XIV stands in his gallery at Versailles surrounded by a brilliant Court: a jack-pudding, a Gilles dressed in rags, comes through the crowd of heroes, of great men and beauties who compose this Court, and proposes to them to leave Corneille, Racine and Molière for a buffoon who has happy sallies and makes grimaces. What, do you think, his reception would be?'

The Academy seems to have received this frigidly

enough, and meanwhile a French version of Elizabeth Montagu's Essay appeared. An Italian one was soon to follow it, and six English editions appeared during the Author's lifetime. Surely a creditable achievement for a woman in the eighteenth century, and one quite worthy of the 'Queen of the Blues'.

The last act in this drama had still to be played. In March 1778 Voltaire sent a second letter to the Academy prefixed to the tragedy of *Irène*. For the last time he hurled pontifical anathemas against Shakespeare and all his supporters.

'Mrs Montagu,' he wrote, 'an estimable citizen of London has been inspired with a pardonable zeal for the fame of her country. Preferring Shakespeare to the authors of *Iphigénie*, *Athalie*, *Polyeucte* and *Cinna* she has written a whole book to assert his superiority, with that sort of enthusiasm which the English show for some fine passages in Shakespeare, that shine through the coarseness of his age. She has ranked him above all others for the sake of such passages. . . .'

A not ungallant way of writing of a woman who had described him as 'translating a language he does not understand, and then criticising his own wretched translation.' In the face of this, it is rather hard to believe Garrick's report that Voltaire had been prodigiously out of humour at Elizabeth's essay and its reflections on himself. If he were, he could afford to be magnanimous. His fame was now at its zenith.

Elizabeth Montagu might have replied to this, if death had not separated the antagonists. Voltaire died in May of the same year, living indeed to enjoy the

enormous popular triumph of the first night of *Irène*, but dying from an overdose of opium soon afterwards.

Irène still wins praise from contemporary critics ; the Essay has not been so fortunate. Mr Saintsbury, in his *History of Criticism*, pronounces it to be ' well-intentioned but rather feeble, much of it being pure *tu quoque* to Voltaire, and sometimes extremely unjust on Corneille and even Æschylus. It is not quite ignorant, but once more, *non tali auxilio*.'

Setting this side by side with Mr Lounsbury's ' one of the most exasperating of books,' it is to be feared that the Essay shares in none of the homage which is paid to its author. Even Mr Nichol Smith attaches little importance to it, and considers it ' a well meaning but shallow and unnecessary reply to Voltaire.'

Taking these criticisms at their highest, they need not unduly depress Elizabeth's admirers. The Essay was essentially a pamphlet, and like most of its kind could hardly be expected to outlive its own generation. After all, the pamphlets of Swift and Defoe are hardly read to-day except by historical students. Elizabeth Montagu's pamphlet is sufficiently vindicated in that it has been read and thought worthy of notice by the critics we have quoted. And, apart from this distinction, it was the first serious work of criticism written by a woman in the English tongue.

9

TO COMPLETE THIS SKETCH of Elizabeth Montagu we must examine some of her portraits; although, more often than not, later generations are repelled by the contemporary portraits of the reigning beauties of the day. Mrs Montagu was blue-stocking as well as beauty, which must have added considerably to the difficulties of the artist.

First of all she sat to Reynolds, in the very height of his popularity as a fashionable portrait painter. But her type was not at all suited to the studio portrait. A woman who drew most of her good looks from her vivacity and animation, naturally enough looks rather 'statuesque' when she is pilloried against the conventional landscape of the period. Even in her teens people did not speak of her as a 'beauty' in the way that they spoke of the Chudleigh, or of Molly Lepel, or the Gunning girls. Men did not burn with desire to possess her; they admired her. No Hamilton would have married her with the ring of a bed curtain in his impatience to complete the ceremony; on the other hand, no man could see Elizabeth without admitting that she was rather lovely. Her beauty was severe, but nevertheless beauty.

Tassie's cameo portrait, from which Wedgwood and Bentley produced a medallion in the new jasper com-

position just coming into fashion, does her greater justice. She was tall and slim—not very tall, but as tall as a good-looking woman ought to be. And on the whole we might describe her as becomingly frail. Her eyes were deep blue under high arching brows, the eyes of a witty and observant woman. She had a profusion of dark brown hair piled high on her head to set off against the fine colouring of her skin. Her hands were small and white, and tapered to delicately pointed fingers, the signs of a nervous and artistic disposition.

There was no trace about her of that dowdiness which we associate with 'blue-stockings.' Far from it. She had a positive horror of unkempt genius. She loved nice clothes, and, like any other woman, would go to any lengths for a new frock. We find her encouraging her friends to smuggle some fine piece of silk for her from France, and Paris quickly demoralized her. Her *Bouffante* and *Coqueluchon* rivalled those of the Parisian ladies whom she visited. She insisted not merely on being 'with' them; she must be 'of' them as far as possible at the same time. Sandals and 'jibbahs' would never have been allowed in the drawing-room of Portman Square.

Wraxall takes her rather severely to task for her attention to clothes. 'Destitute of taste in disposing of the ornaments of her dress,' he says, 'she nevertheless studied those aids more than would seem to become a woman of her philosophic mind.' A mere male is hardly to be trusted on such a delicate subject, but as years went on Elizabeth does seem to have grown a trifle ostentatious. Mrs Thrale in 1780 found her 'brilliant in diamonds,' and Horace Walpole complains about her display of jewellery.

Even if we accepted this criticism it does not impeach her. She was rich, honoured and respected, with an unrivalled position in London Society and a fine house in which to entertain her legions of friends and acquaintances, and in fact, it seems that she gave away most of her jewels to her adopted nephew's bride on their marriage, and at a time when her acquaintance with Wraxall had not begun.

Of her learning we have had some proof. She possessed almost a masculine understanding, cultivated and expanded by the acquaintance of men as well as of books. It was learning which sometimes led her to sententiousness ; it never led her to pedantry.

From her letters we can see that she was solid in criticism, staunch in friendship and tolerant in judgment. A generation which has lost the art of letter-writing may consider them forced and unnatural, but even then they cannot in fairness be said to smell of the midnight oil. The eighteenth-century letter possesses a peculiar standard all of its own, and Elizabeth Montagu conformed strictly to it. Her letters display none of those flashes of brilliant eccentricity which illuminate those of Lady Wortley Montagu ; nor have they the pungent cynicism of Walpole, nor that vein of ' sympathy ' which turns each letter of Mme de Sévigné into an idyll of its kind. They were the letters of the favourite of old Dr Conyers Middleton, enlightened by much donnish learning, sharpened by a pretty wit, and tempered by the experience of a woman of the world.

We may be surprised at her tolerance, but it never became rank latitudinarianism. It extended merely to

the wide limits of what she regarded as permissible, and outside these boundaries she was frank in condemnation. Her doors, which were open to most people, remained firmly shut to the 'fast set.' Elizabeth Chudleigh, Lady Harrington, and Lady Townsend, and the titled drunkards who escorted them, never crossed her threshold. Carlton House and Carlisle House stood invitingly open, but at the most Elizabeth Montagu was occasionally persuaded to make her curtsy at a drawing-room at St James's !

She kept a strict watch upon her heart, so that although she loved and was deeply loved in return, no one has anything to say against her reputation. And this not from prudery, but from a conviction that 'virtue, wisdom, honour, prosperity, happiness are all to be found upon the turnpike road or not to be found at all.'

Reading this with her famous phrase as a girl, that 'the generality of women who have excelled in wit, have failed in chastity,' it is easy to see how the disdainful fidget of eighteen developed into 'the Queen of the Blues.'

She had not only sought the turnpike road, she had kept to the middle of it.

10

SET IN THE ROLLING DOWNS of Berkshire is Sandleford Priory, a long grey Gothic building, facing south. Here Elizabeth Montagu decided to spend the autumn of her days. The Montagus had adopted the second son of Elizabeth's favourite brother Morris, and with him and his wife and family Elizabeth passed a quietly decorous old age. Matthew was a dutiful young man, filled with excellent sentiments which he was at pains to communicate to his aunt on every possible occasion, a great friend of the estimable William Wilberforce, and possibly not so much of a prig as the fond care and affection of Elizabeth might have made him.

Mrs Matthew 'though rather little was of a pleasing countenance, finely made and remarkably genteel.' She brought Matthew a fortune of £50,000 and bred him a family of ten in as many years.

Elizabeth was delighted with her dutiful 'daughter-in-law,' and all the cares she would have lavished on her own family if she had had one, were devoted to making happy the lives of her nephew, and her 'grand-children.' This does not mean that she retired from the world to domestic seclusion. She had, of course, long ago given up the management of her collieries and estates to Matthew, but all the time she kept a watchful eye upon the purse-

strings herself. But the 'old Prioress' could not cut herself adrift from the world where she had so long been a shining figure. At the age of seventy-five we still find her writing to her sister: 'I did not suffer from my amusement at covent garden, and had the pleasure of hearing my friends Drama much applauded, though every part but Mrs Popes was very ill performed. To convince you that my health is not impaired I will inform you that the next day I did the honours of my table to a large party composed of Sir Joseph Banks, the Bishop of Landaff and all our distinguished philosophers; on Thursday last I was at a crowded drawing Room, and to-day Lord and Lady Harrowby and several of their acquaintance are to dine with me; to-morrow I am to dine with Montagu and on Monday they are to meet a large party at dinner here.' But the time soon came when she was no longer equal to these entertainments.

The winter was still spent at Portman Square, but in the summer she would go down to Sandleford, and her daughter-in-law would send her faithful reports of what was happening in London during her absence. The war was going badly; 'Buona Parte' had carried the tricolor triumphantly into Italy. Holland had renounced the coalition and had become a republic under the protection of France. Even the victories of Nelson failed to remove the general despondency. All this and much else was read out loud to the old Prioress, for her own eyes were now too tired to read anything but the green volume of nature.

Seated in a corner of the old Chapel she learnt of the deaths of her friends, of the Dowager Duchess of

Portland, of Sir William Robinson, and of her brothers, and the gradual dissolution as it seemed to her of her world before an immeasurable revolution. From the Chapel her eyes wandered over the terraced gardens where Matthew's children were romping and playing in the heat of a summer sun, watching them anxiously and seeing again her own child who had died so long ago.

* * * * *

Elizabeth Montagu was buried in Winchester Cathedral in her husband's grave, and at her own wish the body of her little son was brought from Burmeston to share his parents' grave with them.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

THE FOUR VOLUMES of Mrs Montagu's letters are admirably edited, the first two by the late Mrs Emily Climenson, the last two by Mr Reginald Blunt, and are indispensable to any study of her. I am greatly obliged to Mr Blunt for permission to make use of them.

I have also been much indebted throughout to the excellent little book by R. Huchon, *Mrs Montagu and her Friends*, and have made particular use of it for the chapter on Elizabeth Montagu and Voltaire.

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